



# Wide Horizons

Edwin Jacques



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LOVINGLY DEDICATED TO  
"MADGE," MY SISTER

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*"If we had known the parting gayly said  
Would be our last . . . and all the roses red  
Would spill their fragrance for me here alone,  
I might have loved you more . . if we had known."*



# Wide Horizons

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## EARLY YEARS

The milkweed pods with tiny flashing sails  
Go by above the winding rutted trails,  
Wide virgin fields lie rich beneath the sun,  
Across the prairie grass the shadows run.

Purple as autumn grapes the hills stand high,  
Some new Mount Sinai thrust against the sky,  
Lording it over all the fertile plain,  
Offering atonement to the sun and rain.

The quiet sloughs, like tranquil pools of gold,  
A thousand shifting images behold,  
Wide fleecy clouds decked out in beauty stark . . .  
The stained deep sky . . the moon . . the starry dark.

Wide furrows on a sloping hill's wide brow,  
Old patient horses straining at the plow,  
The smell of sweat and heat and crumbling soil,  
The clean, good feel of honest decent toil.

Small shacks and little stables crude and new,  
A garden patch, a fireguard or two,  
A creaking windlass with a battered pail,  
A corner-stake beside the new made trail.

Shoulder to shoulder in the light they stand,  
A man and woman working on their land,  
Keeping their faith forever with the years,  
A country's proudest boast—her pioneers.



## LAMPS

I love old lamps, their yellow glow  
Across the kitchen clean,  
It seemed to stand for us, somehow,  
The best that home could mean.

I love old lamps that shed their light,  
Like golden aureoles,  
Across the lonely prairie night  
To homesick neighbor souls.

No road was ever half so long,  
If I could look and see  
Above the lonely rutted trail  
The lamp set out for me.

And though the aching years divide  
Old things serene and sweet,  
Above the dark their beauty shines,  
A lamp unto my feet.

## SOME THINGS HARD TIMES TAUGHT ME

You wouldn't think that poverty  
Could teach you anything,  
That drought and wind and empty fields  
Could make a fellow sing.  
But I have learned that life holds more  
Than all I ever knew,  
The deep, abiding, lovely things  
That live and stay with you.



I've learned that wealth is just a blind  
That sort of seals your eyes  
To little homely common joys  
That's fit for Paradise.  
That all the minted gold of earth  
Is not enough to buy  
A little boy who waits for me  
With worship in his eye.

I've learned that one dear, faithful heart  
Is worth a Sultan's crown;  
No glowing jewels match the light  
In shining eyes of brown.  
I've found a love that serves and waits  
Wherever I may roam,  
Who trims a lamp and sets it there  
To shine, and guide me home.

I've learned that barren drifted fields  
Are not one-half so bare  
As empty hearts where nothing blooms  
To shed its fragrance there.

I've learned to thank the Lord of life  
For this my daily need.

I've love and home and happiness,  
And I am *rich* indeed.

## THE TURN OF THE YEAR

I'm always glad when Winter's turned  
The corner of the year,  
When we can look ahead a bit  
And know that Spring is near.  
Can feel a tugging at your heart  
To think of sprouting grain,



When the days are getting longer  
And the sun is warm again.

When mother starts to figure up  
The hens she's going to set,  
And pouring over catalogues  
To find the seeds she'll get.  
And dad brings bits of harness in  
To oil it up, and sew,  
And plants a hundred grains of wheat  
To see how much will grow.

And when you're watering up the stock  
And lead them from the well,  
They lay their faces to the wind  
And sort of sniff and smell,  
And shake their heads and fluff their manes  
And prance a step or two,  
With little squeals of sheer delight—  
You know how horses do.

The hens are dustin' in the sun  
Before the stable door,  
Or scratching 'round among the feed  
That's scattered on the floor.  
The sunrise has a softer look—  
A sort of hazy blue—  
And in the fields so deep with snow  
The sod is showing through.

For spring will come with faith and hope,  
With sun and wind and rain,  
The mirage still will paint her seas  
Upon a lonely plain.



New wheat will deck a thousand fields,  
New birds will nest and sing,  
And we can hope, when Winter's turned  
The corner of the Spring.

## END OF STEEL

The end of steel, and on from here  
The crouching wilderness is king,  
The slimy muskegs rot and smell  
Like damp old cellars in the spring.  
The gaunt grey poplar trees are bare,  
The white birch sheds its silver bark,  
Above the night a coyote calls  
To find its mate across the dark.

The partridge drums his ageless tune—  
The throbbing mate-song of the wild;  
The beaver dams deserted lie,  
Like ghostly ramparts freshly piled.  
The rocky ridges glow and shine,  
Their seamed old edges gaunt and grey,  
As if the ribs of earth stuck out  
Like elbows through her coat of clay.

A thousand glistening nameless lakes,  
Where wild fowl brood in countless hordes  
Secure from man, they nest and fly,  
The sun and rain their over-lord.  
Her serried crests still bear the print  
Of tranquil passages of time,  
And old forgotten valleys lie  
Between her rugged heights sublime.



Oh, barren frontiers rimmed with snow,  
Where age-old silences prevail,  
Old bones lie bleaching in the sun  
Beside the faintly rutted trail.  
A virgin land whose quiet soul  
Broods on the ways of death and birth  
Hides in the shelter of the Pole  
The ancient secrets of the earth.

## HEROES

*(To a Little Missionary)*

He should have worn a doublet and a sword,  
This little earnest worker of the Lord;  
A suit of mail . . . a gleaming silver shield,  
To shed the arrows of life's battlefield.  
And yet his only armour was a creed,  
A loving sympathy for those in need.

He rode no prancing steed to meet the foe  
(Rough were the lonely trails his feet would know),  
No gallant ending of a high crusade,  
But little lonely shacks that men had made.  
These were his temples, this his church and pew,  
A homesick woman and a child or two.

No foe to meet in ringing open fight,  
But lonely folk to comfort in the night,  
No silver bugles sounding high and clear,  
He fought the unseen foes of hate and fear,  
And battled bravely, all his flags unfurled,  
Preaching his lowly gospel to the world.



No chancel rail to breathe his penance by  
(He holds communion with the earth and sky),  
Spending his youth with glad and lavish hand  
To cheer and bless the people of his land;  
He asks of earth no honor or reward,  
Only the grace to live, and serve the Lord.

### TO THE NEXT GENERATION

Will they love these brown dear fields  
And call them home . . . and sing,  
And watch the amber dawn come up  
Against the gates of spring?  
Will they love small wrinkled streams  
And grey old lichened trees,  
Love to be home at night, and hold  
Small children on their knees?  
Will they be glad for yellow wheat  
And purple misted hills,  
Small woven nests against the eaves  
And flaming daffodils?  
For tiny petals veined with red,  
The smell of rain-washed earth,  
For warm clean rooms where someone sings  
And cradles by the hearth?  
From tired hands we pass to you  
The sickle and the plow,  
Leave all these dear old farms we knew  
For you to harvest now.  
Pass to our sons the rod and staff,  
A trust for years to be,  
Leaving for them these brown dear fields  
Where we held tenancy.

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## THE CARPENTERS

I like to hear them talking at their work,  
Fitting the pieces in where they should go,  
Sawing off ends, so they'll be snug and tight,  
Making their homes secure from wind and snow.

I like the sound of hammers on the air,  
The smell of clean, new lumber is so good,  
Batting around the windows and the doors,  
Handling the pieces of the fragrant wood.

Scantling for joists and sills and clean new boards  
Fresh from the plane, with bits of sawdust on,  
Wide plank for stairs and little quarter rounds,  
Beams for the ceiling, straight and newly sawn.

I like to trace the curving grain of wood,  
The rings of growth in fir, the scent of pine,  
The grey of ash . . . the sheen of golden oak,  
Color as warm as sunlight on old wine.

God must have loved the sight of growing trees  
Because He fashioned them with special care  
And made them strong, and beautiful for men,  
Knowing the burdens they would have to bear.

And down the centuries they stand serene,  
Clothing the earth with beauty and delight,  
Lifting old arms to catch the sun and rain,  
Whispering across the silence and the night.



## MY WORLD

O God, we thank Thee for the sun;

For crickets and white butterflies,

For little frightened creeping things,

The beauty that about us lies!

For the dear voice of little boys

Who sing and whisper to their toys!

For golden bees that softly hum

Above a flower's honey cell;

A tiny creek that sings along

With the clear cadence of a bell;

For small green saplings brave and straight,

A bird's soft singing to its mate!

For yellow tansy flecked with gold;

For old blunt-headed cliffs that rise—

Like gaunt old sentinels they stand

Against the grey of stormy skies;

For sloping meadows green and wide

Upon some peaceful countryside!

How could a world be lone or bare,

That held such wonder in its lap,

The new leaves coming on the trees,

The sudden rising of the sap.

A world so glorious and fair

That angels pause in wonder there?

## OLD FOLKS

I like old people puttering 'round their yards,

Nailing up fences or a bit of lath;

Tying some flowers up against the house,

Or raking leaves beside a garden path.



They seem so sort of settled in their ways,  
Absorbed and still, like a small child who plays.

They figure out just where a nail should go,  
And move with slow old steps and stand and stare,  
Or spade around a clump of lilac trees,  
Turning each shovelful with thoughtful care,  
Or wheel old barrows down a bumpy street,  
Their seamed old faces red with sun and heat.

Life has no power to seer their hearts with woe,  
Time seems to pass them by with tender hand;  
They've won their battles over heart and soul  
And live in some enchanted lovely land,  
Where greed and strife or envy never dare  
To show their faces, among the roses there.

Youth to its play with all their joy ahead,  
Untrodden paths and wonders yet to see;  
Spring has a hundred buds to spill their breath,  
Its unfilled nest in every swaying tree.  
Yet age and harvest yield the fruited vine,  
Peace in their veins like old remembered wine.

### SICK IN BED

I stole one day from all the precious seven  
To be a wee bit sick, it seemed like heaven  
To lie all warm and still, with no one near  
To bother me with things, just lie and hear  
A small bird in a nearby maple tree  
Sing snatches of his newest song for me.

A little neighbor girl played with her doll,  
And gathered buttercups and bounced her ball,



And she, too, sang some wordless lovely thing  
That drifted down the corridors of spring,  
Stirring my heart with vague forgotten tunes,  
Old songs I loved . . old memories . . old Junes.

For it had rained that night and all around  
Small shining pools lay on the rutted ground,  
And there within their tiny stillness caught  
Small bits of sky, blue as forget-me-not.  
A sparrow washed himself in one of them  
And stood to dry upon a hawthorn stem.

Oh, blessed day that gave me time to think,  
Hours to be quiet in, to pause and drink  
From life's small fountains, clear as amethyst  
And all those lovely hours I might have missed.  
For souls need bread like this, and bended knees  
To give us peace and strength, in times like these.

### IF MY GIRL CAME!

If my girl came to me—I'd take her in  
If she was branded with the rod of sin,  
Her face all white, her brown hair old and grey,  
I'd wash her wounds and wipe her tears away.  
And never speak to her about the past—  
Only be glad to have her home at last.

If my girl came to me—a Magdalene,  
And all the sordid things that this could mean,—  
I would not see the sin that made her so,  
I'd see, instead, the child of long ago.  
All fair and good—a little girl again  
Hunting for violets in a shady lane.



If my girl came—with wounded hands and feet,  
Stumbling along this shabby narrow street,  
I'd have the door flung wide, that she might see  
The glowing hearth . . the table set . . and me  
Running to meet her, there beside the gate,  
So many mothers watch and pray—and wait.

And so I think God watches for His own  
Down those old twisted roads they walk alone,  
And leaves the shining gates of heaven ajar  
That He may see them coming from afar  
(And welcome them as earthly mothers do,  
Because I could not shut the door . . on you).

## REAL SPRING

Real spring has come, not shifty, windy rain,  
But violets growing down a quiet lane;  
Not sudden gusts of cold from off the sea,  
But quivering wings in every budding tree.

Real spring with days like jewels set apart,  
And all its age—old hunger in your heart,  
An aching need for sun against your face  
And all the old sweet freedom of the race.

Real spring, with wide brown furrows wet and bare,  
A new young greenness showing everywhere,  
New lambs and colts in pastures warm and green,  
Old orchard trees with daisies in between.

A mother-hen at shining dusk of day  
Finds a warm corner up against the hay,  
And makes of her own body, safe and crude,  
A kindly shelter for her tiny brood.



Wide fields of wheat whose petals, one by one,  
Push small green fingers up to find the sun,  
Whose roots lie deep below the furrowed plain  
Seeking their substance from the sun and rain.

Real spring, with all the fragrant lovely earth,  
Pulsing with eager life and joy and birth,  
A quickening in the hidden heart of things,  
Across the starry dark . . the beat of wings.

## A WOMAN SPEAKS

I always go to church at night, you see  
My clothes are old and seem to sag on me.  
The dark is kind to us, the shabby poor,  
We can slip in a seat beside the door.  
The organ seems to ease my troubled brain,  
And gives me strength to face the world again.

The preacher's face is full of calm repose.  
(I wonder if he ever wore old clothes,  
And slinked at night along a darkened street,  
And was ashamed of ill clad, shabby feet.)  
O God! I know I shouldn't mind this dress,  
But clothe my heart instead with loveliness.

Some of the women have such lovely things  
(How can my spirit, Lord, rise up on wings?)  
I'll try to listen to the preacher more,  
There's such a draft comes through that swinging door.  
I like this hymn, my mother loved it, too,  
It brings old tender things so close to you.



Thy mother, too, was poor, so maybe she  
Would understand this aching need in me—  
The love of pretty things, new clothes to wear,  
The food of poverty is bitter fare.  
And yet she kept her soul untouched by sin,  
Her mother love and faith shone bright within.

And so I'll try again to do my part.  
(Water the barren places of my heart.)  
Lead us beside green pastures, still and cool;  
Be with the children when they go to school;  
And comfort me, O God! and give me grace  
To serve my household—with a smiling face.

### TO BE AWARE

To be a part of life . . . to be aware  
Of all the hidden beauty glowing there,  
Grey sidewalks throbbing in the noonday heat,  
Red lights reflected on a rainy street.  
A florist's window shining through the rain—  
Carnations, red as blood, against the pane.

To sense beneath the city's murmurings  
The deep significance of common things,  
To see behind the clamour of a crowd  
A grey old woman sewing at her shroud,  
To glimpse above the hilltops, high and clean,  
The quiet brooding feel of the Unseen.

To think that all about these ways we know  
The changeless tides of life forever flow,  
The quenchless fires burning on the hearth,  
Warming the lonely people of the earth.



The salty far-off fragrance of the sea,  
Old ancient churches steep in mystery.

To be aware of all this life today,  
The undefeated women, brave and gay,  
Men with old wounds that hurt them in the night,  
Dim rooms that whisper in the candle-light.  
(I ask of Life no finer, grander bliss,  
Than just to be alive . . . and part of this.)

### MY WISH

If I could leave upon my country's heart,  
One shining song to rest in beauty there,  
That tired mothers at their daily work  
Could find in it new strength their day to bear,  
Or sit with folded hands, when night comes down,  
Find sweeter peace among the shadows brown.

If some one at his plow could lift his eyes  
Above the crumbling furrow's ragged edge  
And see the aching loveliness of earth,  
Old twisted pines against a windy ledge,  
A mother bird, whose mate in rapture sings,  
Covering her brood with little anxious wings.

If some young mother homesick and alone,  
Finding the days so difficult and hard,  
Looked out and saw a clump of daffodils,  
Like little golden candles in the yard,  
And found a new content within her heart,  
A deeper love to help her do her part.

And so if I could leave a shining song  
To lift their hearts above one crowded day,





And bid them walk with beauty like a torch,  
A light above their heads to show the way,  
I shall not sing in vain, if this may be,  
Echoing down dim roads again to me.

### PRAYER

Sometimes I pray with words—  
Poor faltering things—  
But faith and love will give them  
Shining wings.

Sometimes a longing in the  
Soul of me,  
A hungry need that reaches  
Out for Thee.

And sometimes, Lord, it isn't  
Even thought—  
Just love and gratitude for  
Wonders wrought.

A blade of wheat . . . a wee brown  
Frightened mole;  
The print of ferns  
In shining layers of coal.

Tall spires, faintly silver  
In the dusk;  
A tangled garden  
And the scent of musk.

All this is speaking in me  
When I pray;

241 Oh listen, Lord! . . . for things  
I cannot say.

